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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000845

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [KCRM](#) [KISL](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN - FORMER UTO COMMANDER ZIYOEV KILLED

REF: A. A: DUSHANBE 617

[1](#)B. REF B: DUSHANBE 714

[1](#)C. REF C: IIR 6947 0086 09

[1](#)D. REF D: IIR 6947 0084 09

CLASSIFIED BY: TRACEY A.JACOBSON, AMB, EXE, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On July 11 former United Tajik Opposition (UTO) commander and Minister of Emergency Situations Mirzo Ziyoev was killed in mysterious circumstances in Tavildara district. He was with the armed group led by Ne'mat Azizov and Mullo Abdullo in the week preceding his death. There are conflicting stories circulating that members of the armed group killed him because he had betrayed them to security forces, or that government forces killed him to prevent him from revealing information about weapons smuggling by government employees. Whatever the truth, another major opposition figure has just left the scene, as the long process of eliminating opposition figures continues. Ziyoev's death occurred during an uptick in reports of clashes in the Tavildara area of central Tajikistan as armed groups attacked police checkpoints and, reportedly, the village of Tavildara itself. The government increased its security presence in areas near the fighting and in the capital. Post has yet to see any local reaction to Ziyoev's death. End summary.

CLASHES FLARE BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION FORCES

[1](#)2. (C) On the night of July 8, a group of armed men attacked a police checkpoint near Tavildara village. According to reports, police repelled the attackers, injuring several of them. Post does not know whether the attackers were members of the group of fighters led by Ne'mat Azizov and Mullo Abdullo, which has been in the Tavildara area since May (Reftels). Azizov is a former UTO mid-level commander from Darvoz. As part of the peace accords, he was integrated into the Committee on Emergency Situations as a Colonel. Abdullo, a former mid-level UTO commander, left Tajikistan in 1998 in disagreement with the Tajikistan peace accords, and was rumored to have crossed into Tajikistan from Afghanistan several weeks ago. There is speculation here that he and several foreign fighters returned to Tajikistan because of pressure from Pakistan's offensive against the Taliban.

A CONFUSING TALE, ENDING IN VIOLENT DEATH

[1](#)3. (C) Ziyoev reportedly joined Azizov's group in the Tavildara

region about a week ago. From that point the stories about his actions and death diverge. An embassy contact associated with Mirzo Ziyoev told embassy staff that Abdullo's group occupied Tavildara village on July 8. According to this source, government forces using armed helicopters forced the fighters to retreat into the surrounding mountains, regaining control of the village the following day. However, press reports based on government information claim that Ziyoev was captured during this operation, and then agreed to reveal the locations of opposition arms caches and to persuade the Azizov group to surrender. But the embassy source claims Ziyoev went of his own accord to negotiate with government security forces on July 11, and then returned to Azizov and Abdullo to persuade them to surrender. According to the embassy source, government officials convinced Ziyoev to leave behind several of the opposition fighters who had accompanied him to the negotiations, held in Childara. When Ziyoev returned to Tavildara to persuade the Azizovo group to surrender, they accused him of betraying them and shot him dead.

14. (C) OSCE Ambassador Pryakhin (protect) heard another version of events, which he told Ambassador on July 13. Pryakhin said that security forces killed Ziyoev because Ziyoev had been involved in arms smuggling, and had actually purchased weapons from government employees - in other words, he knew too much about government corruption. Pryakhin also said that the foreign fighters with Azizov and Abdullo, reported in the press to be Chechens, were in fact Dagestanis. Indian Ambassador Amar Sinha (protect) told Ambassador that helicopters had delivered several prisoners to the Indian-constructed airfield at Aini, just outside Dushanbe, but he had no further information on who the prisoners were.

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15. (C) On the night of July 11, a group of armed men attacked a teahouse in Labi Jar, on the main highway from Dushanbe to Garm at the Tavildara junction. Post has received rumors that the attackers were from Rasht, and that they killed 10 police and destroyed an armored personnel carrier. Embassy has no confirmation of these casualties. The government reported only that an unspecified "incident" took place at Labi Jar.

WHO WAS MIRZO ZIYOEV?

16. (SBU) Ziyoev was the senior commander of the United Tajik Opposition during the Tajik civil war in the 1990s. When the warring factions made peace in 1997, their deal called 30 percent of government positions to go to opposition members. Ziyoev became Minister of Emergency Situations and Civil Defense. He served in this position from 1999 until President Rahmon removed him without explanation in 2006. Despite being a Minister, Ziyoev enjoyed little power while serving in national government, and his ministry was poorly funded. Since leaving government Ziyoev was a private businessman and owned a large estate near Tavildara. He had publicly reconfirmed his loyalty to the government as recently as May 2009.

ENHANCED SECURITY MEASURES IN DUSHANBE

17. (C) Post noticed an increase in armed police presence in Dushanbe beginning late on Wednesday July 8, coinciding with the first opposition attack on the Tavildara checkpoint. Armed police were present in several outlying neighborhoods of

Dushanbe which had been UTO strongholds during the civil war. Police in Ispechak and Avul neighborhoods reportedly stopped vehicles and questioned their occupants. The increased security became sporadic over the weekend, and seems to have returned to normal. There have been no reports of attacks in Dushanbe.

COMMENT - TREES FALL IN THE FOREST, BUT LIFE GOES ON

18. (C) Comment: We must be careful not to speculate too heavily on the implications of Ziyoev's death. Post lacks specific information on any of the events noted in this cable, except for the increase in security in Dushanbe. However, Ziyoev was a leading opposition figure, and his death continues the trend wherein President Rahmon has sidelined, exiled, imprisoned, or killed opposition leaders who joined the Government as part of the accords ending the civil war. The last opposition figure with a senior position in government is now Deputy Defense Minister Faiziyev. Beyond the brief increase in security, we have not seen actions resulting from Ziyoev's death, although there are rumors that the Labi Jar attack and other incidents were the work of militants from Rasht, not Tavildara, and that Presidential brother in law Hassan Assadulzoda was offering money to Rasht militants to keep quiet. Superficially the government does not appear to be in crisis mode. The President of Latvia visited over the weekend, the European Union "Troika" is in town for consultations, and President Rahmon left the country on July 13 for the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Egypt. The Government may be going to some lengths to show that all is normal, because they do not want to give Russia an excuse to offer them security protection. So far as post knows the Russian military units based in Tajikistan have engaged in no unusual activities. We will be watching for further incidents or unusual military movements, and for any sign that violence is spreading beyond Tavildara
JACOBSON